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Identical letters dated 20 February 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the thirty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/144).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the points made in its previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions. Regrettably, the report maintains its broadly negative framework and ignores the real causes of Syrian suffering and restrictions on humanitarian access. These are primarily attributable to the spread of terrorism and foreign terrorist fighters backed by Governments of United Nations Member States, the imposition of unilateral coercive economic measures on the Syrian people, and the obstruction of efforts toward a peaceful political resolution by certain States that benefit from the prolongation of the Syrian crisis.

Below are some of the key observations of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the current report of the Secretary-General:

1. The report omits the significant and major role played by the Syrian State and its institutions in providing basic services, aid and support to all Syrians without discrimination so that they are able to withstand and move beyond this crisis.

2. The Syrian Government is fulfilling its constitutional and legal duty under national legislation and international law to defend its people against the terrorist organizations Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusrah Front and the terrorist entities and operatives, with numerous names and affiliations, that are associated with them. The success of humanitarian operations in Syria is fundamentally attributable to the Syrian Government's considerable efforts in that regard.

3. The Syrian Government reiterates that in the course of carrying out its counter-terrorism efforts, it has complied fully with the provisions of international

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law and international humanitarian law regarding the protection and security of civilians and the safety of civilian service facilities, such as hospitals and schools.

4. The Syrian Government is committed to the cessation of hostilities agreement that entered into force on 30 December 2016. The armed terrorist groups have continued to violate the agreement. They have carried out suicide attacks in several areas, including Damascus, and have fired shells and other projectiles at civilians in numerous cities and governorates.

5. Now that eastern Aleppo has been liberated, the authorities there have discovered large warehouses full of international food and medical aid that was appropriated by the armed terrorist groups and not allowed to reach those in need. We informed the World Health Organization (WHO) in Damascus of those seizures, which show that certain parties had falsely accused the Syrian Government.

6. The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat should cautiously assess the sources of its information and not rely on so-called "open sources" or other sources that are politicized, biased toward terrorist groups and have no credibility, as their primary concern is to direct criticism and false allegations at the Syrian Government and its allies. The reports produced by the Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have, unfortunately, been a far cry from the truth and the facts. Instead, they have relied on lies and allegations spread by armed terrorist groups and the regional and foreign parties and Governments that support and protect them, and by artificial entities such as the so-called White Helmets.

7. The Syrian Government rejects the report's insistence on making the legal error of referring to the armed terrorist groups as the "non-State armed opposition" when they know that these groups, which are associated with ISIL and the Nusrah Front, are in fact terrorists and use civilians as human shields. They have also used water as a tool of war and collective punishment and blackmail; have targeted civilians and populated areas with mortars, tanks, missiles and car bombs; and engage in torture, kidnapping, murder and sabotage.

8. The Syrian Government regrets that the report fails to state clearly that the so-called international coalition and its allies are responsible for the loss of innocent civilian lives in indiscriminate attacks in northern and eastern Syria and for the destruction of Syrian infrastructure. The systematic destruction of Syrian infrastructure such as oil and gas wells, dams, bridges, and water and energy sources was the result of "international coalition" operations. The Secretariat is therefore obliged to inform Member States of their results in detail, especially since such destruction exacerbates the suffering of the Syrian people, prevents them from meeting their daily needs, deprives them of key services, weakens their development gains and reduces reconstruction funding.

9. The Syrian Government rejects the so-called International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The establishment of such a mechanism contravened the Charter and flagrantly exceeded the prerogatives of the General Assembly. The Syrian Government further reaffirms all the statements made in this regard in its letter of 20 February 2017 to the Secretary-General.

10. The Syrian Government is surprised at the vague language used in paragraph 7 of the report. The authors ignore the fact that the terrorist ISIL organization was responsible for cutting off the water supply to the city of Aleppo by disabling the Khafsah water station. That stance could be interpreted as a defence of this terrorist organization and its supporters, particularly the Governments of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, dishonesty before the international community about the reality behind events in Syria.

11. The Syrian Government reiterates that it alone is responsible for protecting Syrians, and that Member States and international organizations, including the United Nations, must respect and observe this principle. The United Nations must exert pressure on Governments that have violated the rights of Syrians by using terrorism to achieve political objectives and interests.

With respect to the issue of protection and the report's treatment of the situation of Syrians during the winter, the Syrian Government reiterates that it would have been more helpful for the Secretariat to ask European Union countries and the United States to halt their unilateral coercive measures against Syria. Those measures prevented access to heating and cooking fuel and electricity in Syria, leading to great suffering for millions of Syrians owing to this year's bitter winter cold and power outages. All the while, the United Nations and the international community have merely stood by and watched.

12. The Syrian Government once again condemns the Secretariat's continued bias towards the Turkish Government to the detriment of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians in Hasakah governorate. Syrian civilians have been affected by that Government's deliberate closure of the Nusaybin border crossing and its refusal to approve United Nations requests for humanitarian assistance to Hasakah governorate via that crossing. The Syrian Government reaffirms that the crossing was not temporarily closed for security reasons since December 2015 but rather for well-known political reasons. In short, it is aimed at increasing the suffering of Syrian civilians in Hasakah and Qamishli besieged by armed terrorist groups, notably ISIL.

13. The Syrian Government regrets that the Secretariat still refuses to acknowledge that the armed terrorist groups, primarily the Nusrah Front, that are deployed in Wadi Barada in Rif Dimashq governorate, committed a despicable crime by cutting off the water supply from millions of Syrians in the city of Damascus before the Syrian Government liberated the area. Those groups did so to exert political pressure on the Government and people of Syria. The Secretariat knows that this shameful act was not the first of its kind, but was criminal conduct that had occurred repeatedly in recent years in the governorates of Damascus, Aleppo, Dar'a and elsewhere. It is a war crime and a crime against humanity.

14. During the period covered by the report, the Syrian Government facilitated the evacuation of numerous medical cases and provided humanitarian assistance to Syrian towns and cities without discrimination. The Syrian Government expresses its astonishment at the Secretariat's failure to mention the obstruction by armed terrorist groups, particularly those besieging the towns of Kafraya and Fu'ah, of the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of medical cases. On 8 February 2017, the Syrian Government delivered a letter to the Resident Coordinator inviting United Nations bodies to launch an urgent and

comprehensive initiative to deliver assistance immediately to Kafraya and Fu'ah with simultaneous delivery of assistance to the Zabadani and Madaya areas, and to urge the Turkish, Saudi Arabian and Qatari regimes to use their influence over terrorist groups to allow aid to the besieged towns of Kafraya and Fu'ah in order to avert a humanitarian catastrophe as a result of famine and bitter cold.

15. The Syrian Government deeply regrets that the report's authors have failed in their mandate to report on the immense economic, social and humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people as a result of the continued imposition of coercive unilateral economic measures against Syria by the United States, the European Union and other States. The Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions affirm that such unilateral coercive measures are illegal and must be lifted.

16. The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations, particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has made no effort worth mentioning to implement monthly plans for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all parts of Syria, whether stable or unstable. Political considerations have to a great extent been given priority over humanitarian work, and humanitarian officers at the United Nations are unable to fulfil their basic relevant humanitarian obligations to strengthen the humanitarian response to the needs of Syrians, such as:

- Mobilizing adequate and unconditional funding for response plans;
- Calling on the international community to lift the crippling economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on all Syrians by the European Union, the United States and other countries;
- Ending partiality toward Western States in the Security Council and their hostile positions on the Syrian Government;
- Ceasing to condone violations, such as blocking of humanitarian access, committed by the armed terrorist groups and their supporters.

17. The Syrian Government notes that its approval for the United Nations plan for humanitarian assistance convoys for the month of February was conveyed in a note dated 31 January 2017, not 1 February 2017 as stated in paragraph 32.

18. Several humanitarian assistance convoys were sent in January and the beginning of February, including two convoys to Tall and Damir, another to Rastan, and a fourth to Talbisah. A number of other convoys are in the process of being arranged.

19. The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's promotion of cross-border assistance. Such assistance is ineffective and most of it ends up falling into the hands of armed terrorist groups in the target areas. The same applies to the promotion of cross-border vaccination campaigns, whose importance has been overstated, and which have on several occasions led to the deaths of children from vaccines that were tainted or administered by non-specialists. The Syrian Government stresses that the notifications sent to it do not meet the minimum standard of credibility in terms of figures, information, numbers of beneficiaries and particulars on which parties collect aid to distribute it to civilian recipients. That point is confirmed by the report itself in paragraph 29 regarding the confiscation by terrorist groups of trucks in a humanitarian convoy, and is particularly applicable in

the case of cross-border assistance. Such a situation serves only to increase pressure on the rightful recipients, as happened when those groups were deployed in the neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo. The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism cannot verify that cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries, and has thus far proven to be incapable of doing so. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are entry points for arms, materiel and ammunition being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Syrian Government strongly rejects the authors' continued bias in favour of Turkey and Jordan when discussing the delivery of cross-border assistance. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

20. On 27 December 2016, the Syrian Government approved the request submitted by WHO to deliver medical assistance, including dialysis sessions, to Duma in Rif Dimashq.

21. The Syrian Government emphasizes that the armed terrorist groups are responsible for the continued suffering of the Palestine refugees in the Yarmouk camp and in other areas, and that the terrorist organization ISIL has for some months prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching several areas.

22. The Syrian Government rejects the references in paragraph 20 to "pro-Government militias". Syrian Government forces do not cooperate with "militias". They cooperate, subject to Government approval, with associated groups that help them to combat terrorism legally and legitimately.

23. The Syrian Government stresses that the Secretariat should verify its information and endeavour to update it continuously when drafting its reports. For example, the number of foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Syria is now 25 (see annexed updated list of such organizations), not 17 as stated in the report. All those organizations are provided with the facilities necessary for carrying out their work, in accordance with Syrian national law. In 2016, the Syrian Government granted more than 1,400 entry visas to United Nations staff. During the month of January, it approved 30 applications for entry visas to Syria (not 25) and 57 applications for renewal of residence (not 48).

24. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on dialogue among Syrians under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. The Syrian Government stresses that it is fighting terrorism with a view to reaching a political solution. We remind the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people with no legal or moral basis. We also stress the constructive role played by the Syrian Government in the success of the two Astana meetings and the establishment of a cessation of hostilities.

25. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist

groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Minister Plenipotentiary
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex to the identical letters dated 20 February 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

List of foreign non-governmental organizations operating in the Syria Arab Republic in the area of humanitarian assistance (as of 18 February 2017)

1	Première urgence internationale	France
2	International Medical Corps	United States of America
3	Danish Refugee Council	Denmark
4	Help	Germany
5	Action contre la faim	Spain
6	Secours islamique	France
7	Terres des hommes	Italy
8	Institut européen de coopération et de développement (IECD)	France
9	Norwegian Refugee Council	Norway
10	Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)	United States of America
11	Oxfam International	United Kingdom
12	Aga Khan Development Network	United Kingdom
13	SOS	Austria
14	Gruppo di volontariato civile (GVC)	Italy
15	Medair	Switzerland
16	Associazione volontari per il servizio internazionale (AVSI)	Italy
17	Armadilla	Italy
18	Rebuild Iraq Recruitment Program	Germany
19	International Relief Organization	Germany
20	Rescate	Spain
21	COOPI — Cooperazione internazionale	Italy
22	Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society	Russia

23	SOS Chrétiens d'Orient	France
24	SAWA for Development and Aid	United States of America
25	DORCAS	Spain